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SUBJECT: Fiji's Government Intimidates the Opposition; Bainimarama Harassed

11. (U) Summary: A recent spate of late-night vandalism targeting opponents of Fiji's interim government (IG) ratcheted up a notch Sunday night with two unsuccessful fire-bombings. Meanwhile, a group of young men verbally harassed Interim Prime Minister Bainimarama on March 14 during two apparently orchestrated occasions, allegedly on instruction of a provincial leader. End summary.

#### Escalating Threats Against IG Opponents -----

12. (U) A trend of low-level and so far non-fatal acts of vandalism targeting IG opponents is rising. Attacks have occurred intermittently since the 2006 coup. In 2008, the homes and cars of the publisher and the general manager of the Daily Post newspaper were stoned, and the car windows of a lawyer representing deposed Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase were smashed, among other incidents. The recent attacks, however, occurring with increased frequency and heightened violence, represent an increase in pressure against the IG's opponents.

13. (U) On January 28, the house and car of IG critic and unionist Kenneth Zinck were stoned in the early morning hours. In early February, the car of Akuila Naco, a lawyer representing a chief charged with attempting to assassinate Bainimarama in 2007, was smashed with rocks. On March 16, the house and car of unionist Attar Singh were attacked with stones. Singh is the chairman of the Movement for Democracy in Fiji, which opposes the IG and includes the SDL and UPP as well as local NGOs. That same night, the house and car of Sakiusa Raivoce were attacked by stones. Raivoce sits on the boards of both the SDL (Qarase's party) and the Movement for Democracy in Fiji.

14. (U) In the early hours of Sunday morning, March 22, a group of men threw homemade Molotov cocktails at the homes of Raivoce and Netani Rika, editor of the Fiji Times, Fiji's largest circulation daily newspaper. Neither incident resulted in a fire, and there were no injuries. The attacks were well planned, with the attackers following pre-determined escape routes to a waiting vehicle.

15. (U) Police claim to be investigating the incidents, and both Bainimarama and the interim defense minister belatedly condemned the attacks. In the meanwhile, those attacked remain defiant. Fiji's newspaper editors say they will continue their work without fear. Meanwhile, the military has issued a stern warning against suggesting that it may have had something to do with the attacks.

#### Harassment of Bainimarama -----

16. (SBU) In an unrelated but interesting development, Bainimarama and his family were set upon and harassed by a group of men on March 14, in what appear to be orchestrated incidents. According to SDL spokesman Peceli Kinivuwai, who was called to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks and questioned about the event, Bainimarama and his family were at a Suva shopping mall when a group of men created a disturbance to distract the bodyguards. The men then confronted and swore at Bainimarama. Later that night, at a boxing match, this same group of men harassed Bainimarama again.

¶7. (SBU) The military ultimately detained two of the men, who said they were from Naitasiri Province (inland from Suva) and that Kinivuwai, along with Naitasiri Provincial Council Chairman and former SDL minister Ratu Ilaitia Tuisese, asked them to confront Bainimarama. The military thereafter requested Kinivuwai to report to the Queen Elizabeth Barracks for questioning. Kinivuwai told us he had denied having anything to do with the attack, emphasizing that the SDL is focused on political dialogue and does not want to see a violent confrontation.

Comment

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¶8. (U) Low level attacks against IG opponents have occurred intermittently since the 2006 coup. The recent increase in frequency and violence is cause for concern. A number of different groups could be responsible, with the military at the top of the list of probable suspects. Past coup governments have used prisoners or unemployed men from the countryside to do their dirty work, and certainly that is a possibility in this case as well.

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